

## THE GLOBAL CHURCH TODAY

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In speaking of "The Global church Today," I am going to give special attention to the churches of the Third World. That means I must tear myself away from the church in fourteenth century Asia, which is what I am working on at present, and try to crawl back into the land of the living, which is not easy for a historian.

The only way I can possibly deal with a global church, and a whole century in a brief survey, is to take a page from a friend, who once studied to be an aeronautical engineer, and fly high enough and fast enough to see the world and the century in one mind—boggling statistical glance.

The question I will address is this: Have these last ninety years of its 2000 year history really made any lasting, world-class differences in the church and its Christian influence in the world?

### *A. Size of the Christian Church*

The first thing one might notice about the Christian church, could it be seen from above spread out like a map across the world, would be its size, one out of every three people in the world call themselves Christian. Surprisingly, that much has

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changed very little in one hundred years. It was true in 1900; it is still true in 1990.<sup>1</sup>

Now, for Christians, and especially for theologians, numbers are not the most important thing about the church, and they are right. But I am beginning to realize that trying to understand the church in history without some idea of the effect of numbers is like trying to understand modern physics without paying attention to the concept of mass. Mass is not the same as energy, and numbers do not measure quality, but just as Einstein's revolutionary theory of relativity (as in his famous equation  $e=mc^2$ ),<sup>2</sup> has proved to modern science that the relationship of energy to mass is of vital importance in physics, so, I am beginning to realize, the relationship in the church between the number of its members and the quality of its members has greatly shaped the influence in history of Christianity throughout the world.

A major difference between Western church history and Asian church history, for example, is that the Western church, for reasons both good and bad, produced enough of a critical mass of Christians to change the culture of a whole continent. That never happened in Asia. One reason for the fact that Asia's overall culture has for centuries been either Buddhist, or Confucian or Muslim, is that nowhere did it produce enough Christians in any one nation for a long enough period to affect the whole nation with any lasting significance. Numbers do make a difference.

Looking first at the numbers, then, what do we see in the global church today? Well, strictly by the numbers we are doing very

<sup>1</sup>My principal statistical sources are: David Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia (WCE)* (Oxford University Press, 1982), With annual updates in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research (IBMR)* (New Haven, January issue); compared with and occasionally adjusted to F. K. Jansen, ed., *Target Earth* (Pasadena California: Global Mapping International, 1989). Differences between the two often trace to differences of definitions and dates of statistical bases.

<sup>2</sup>That is, energy equals mass times the speed of light squared.

well. In 1900 there were 550 million Christians; today in 1990 there are three times that many, 1,800 million. That is the good news. In almost a hundred years we have tripled the number of Christians.

### *B. Proportion: Decline in the West*

But numbers do not make all the difference even in statistics. In church statistics, as in physics, we have to be a little more mathematically sophisticated than that. The relation of any one measurable mass, an object, to another mass varies not only in its numbers, but in its proportions, as in statistical percentages.

In church statistics that leads us from our first basic measurement by number of members, which was very encouraging in our twentieth century, to the more significant study of how those members are related proportionally to the increasing population of the world as a whole, and to how evenly or unevenly they are distributed throughout the world. That, I have found, is not quite so encouraging.

In proportion to the world's population, Christians have not tripled. We are barely holding our own. In fact, we are actually slipping back a little. Almost a hundred years ago in 1900, the world's 500 million Christians were 34.4% of the world's population. Today, though it is true that we have tripled the numbers, in proportion to world population we have fallen back to 33.2%. A loss of one percentage point may not sound too bad, but to put it back into numbers, it means that in the last ninety years world Christianity is 73 million members short of what it would be had it simply kept up with the population growth.<sup>3</sup>

Year	World pop.	Christians	Xn. % of world pop.
1900	1,600 m.	550 m.	34.4%
1950	2,400 m.	800 m.	33.7%
1980	4,400 m.	1,400 m.	32.8%
1990	5,300 m.	1,800 m.	33.2%
1991	5,480 m.	1,833 m.	33.4%

Perhaps it would simplify the picture if, from that vantage point in space of which I spoke earlier, my distant view could compress all the people of the world into one global village of 100 families. A "family" in such a statistically condensed world would be 1% of the world's actual population at any point in time. In 1900 the "family" would have consisted of 16 million people; in 1990 the same family would have grown to 53 million. That is what the population explosion has done to the world. It has exploded the size of a "global family" (1% of the population) more than threefold in only ninety years. (To simplify the figures I will round that 53 m. to 50m. What is three million when world population increases nearly 100 million a year!)

What has this combination of population explosion and membership loss done to the 34 Christian "families" (of sixteen million people each in 1900, but now 50 million) with which the church started the twentieth century? From that global village perspective, Christianity has lost a family and a half since 1900 (which now means it has lost 73 million adherents). But as significant as the loss itself, is the consideration of where the loss occurred. Most of this slippage in the number of Christians in the world has been happening where Christianity was strongest, in what was once called Christendom. Western Christians in 1900 represented 85% of all the world's Christians. By 1985 the proportion had dropped to 54%.

This shocking numerical decline of the Western churches is the most alarming single fact of modern church history. European and North American churches are losing about 6,000 members a day, over 2 million a year.<sup>4</sup> But I must leave the West at this

D. Barrett, in *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (IBMR), Jan. 1990, p. 27 (numbers rounded off). 1950 figures from estimates in 1949 and 1952, in E. J. Bingle and K. G. Grubb, *World Christian Handbook, 1952* (London: World Dominion Press, 1952), p. 121.

<sup>4</sup>In 1900 the number of Western Christians (more developed countries) was about 470 million; in the Third World 87 million; in 1985 the propor-

point, and look more closely at the churches of the Third (or developing) World, the churches of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

But first, one more look at the whole global village, this time in terms of the world's religions. Time permits only a quick count of the overall adherents of each religion. How many of these "families" of 50 million people belong to one of the world's great religions? This is how the world looks today:<sup>5</sup>

	1902		1992
Christians	34	33 families (1,759 m.)	1,833 m.
Muslims	18	18 families (935 m.)	988
[Nonreligious	16	17 families (866 m.)]	897
Hindus	13	14 families (705 m.)	736
Buddhists	6	5 families (323 m.)	330
[New religions		2 families (117 m.)]	124
Tribal religions		2 families (100 m.)	100

Five of the categories are familiar, the world's largest traditional religions. But note the two categories in brackets. The twentieth century has added two new groups to the list. The first and largest is a whole new cluster of 17 families (866 m. people) that has been uncomfortably included in the village's religious mix. These are the ones who say "who cares about the old religions? This is the twentieth century, and we have no religion any more." On a recent one-day tour from Macao across the border into communist China, our tour guide pointed to a Buddhist temple. "We don't believe in that any more," he said. "We don't believe in anything except ourselves." The world's third largest religion today after Christianity and Islam is "No-Religion" religion. It is a Western disease, and it has spread everywhere.

tion was about 860 m. to 685 m. The loss was most massive in communist Russia, but even in Europe and North America, church member loss has recently been estimated at about 6,000 a day, over, 2 million a year. *WCE*, pp. 4, 7.

<sup>5</sup>IBMR, 1990 update (Jan. 1990), p. 27.

But others, either more honest or more credulous, have discovered that "no religion" is a self-delusion, and openly admit that they have created new religions to take the place of the old ones they have abandoned. They come in many shapes and sizes from "Religious Science" to "New Age," and are now the seventh largest segment of the world's religious spectrum.

### C. Proportion: Expansion in the Third World

But now let me bring the focus down closer to the non-Western part of the world which is usually called the Third World. Some prefer to call it the two-thirds world but it is more nearly three-fourths of our world. A more accurate name, but too long, might be "the less economically developed world." When we look at the globe by continents, three fourths of all the people in the world live in that Third World. More than half of them live in just one continent, Asia.

If the numerical decline in Western Christianity is one of the most alarming facts of our recent history, the most cheering fact should surely be what is happening to Christianity in the Third World.

Third World historians may someday tell us that in terms of the human situation, the twentieth century did not really begin until 1945 and is ending already in 1990. That makes this a very short century. Why begin with 1945? Because the 1940s mark the beginning of the end of Western colonialism. And why end in 1990? Because today we may be watching the beginning of the end of communist imperialism. We could be wrong, but for the moment that is how it looks. At least we can say that those two dates do mark extremely critical turning points in this century, not only for the world but also for the Christian church. In church history this is "the century of the rise of the Third World church."

Look again at the world as a village. In 1900, comparing the Third World and the West, 28 of the 34 Christian families in the village were Western and 6 were Third World. (Remember that each family in this picture then represented only 16 million people). Of these, 28 out of 34 were in Europe or North America; only 6 were in Asia, Africa and Latin America. But in 1990, out of the 33 Christian families each with 50 m. now in the village, only 14 are in the West, while 18 are in Third World churches. The balance numerically has swung to the Third World. Here are the figures:<sup>6</sup>

	1900	1990
The West (more developed)	431 m. Christians	705 m.
Third World	91 m. Christians	869 m.

What happened? Some people put the shift very dramatically in terms of color. Anthropologically that is very unscientific, and socially it lends itself to racism, but unfortunately the color of the human skin is still the most common way sinful human beings divide themselves from each other.

From the common but sinful perspective of color, sometime in the year 1981 a critical, historic change occurred in the color of Christianity. When I was in communist China in the early 1950s, I was painfully conscious that most of Asia thought of Christianity as "the white man's religion." That was the standard communist

<sup>6</sup>8 of the "global families" are in Latin America, 5 in Africa, and 4 in Asia. The chart below (based on statistics in *WCE* and *IBMR* (1990) summarizes the number (in millions) of professing Christians and the percentage of Christians to world population by continents:

Year	Eur. USSR	N. America	Lat. Am.	Africa	Asia & Oc.
1900	371 = 24.0%	60 = 3.7%	60 = 3.7	8.7 = 0.5%	22.4 = 1.4%
1980	500 = 11.5%	179 = 5.0%	340 = 8.0	165 = 3.5%	163 = 3.7%
1990	516 = 9.7%	189 = 3.6%	428 = 8.2	231 = 4.5%	210 = 4.0%

Where 1990 percentages do not match global statistics, the 1% or so difference is probably due to exclusion of "marginal" Christians.

1991 519 = 9.5% | 192 = 3.5% | 461 = 8.4% | 250 = 4.6% | 245 = 4.5%

anti-Christian line in Asia. White Christians against yellow Asia. In Africa, on the other hand, the Muslim anti-Christian line was black against white. Islam is *black* and Africa is black, but Christianity is white and does not belong in Africa.

Well, thought it still sounds racist to me, there is at least one advantage to looking at the global church from the perspective of color. It puts the lie to slogans like "Islam is black" and "Christianity is white." Islam has always been more brown than black. And as we study the church charts, like weather watchers studying climate maps, the statistics have almost unnoticed changed in the year 1981, "for the first time [in] 1200 years," non-whites became a majority of the village's 33 Christian families, 17 to 16 (or 50.5%). And by the year 2000, when the village will once more have 34 Christian families, for the slippage has stopped thanks to the rise of the Third-World churches, then the estimated proportion will be about 20 non-white to 16 white Christian families (or 55%).<sup>7</sup>

"The white man's religion?" Not any more. For the first time since the Angles defeated the Saxons and began to unite England, and since Silla defeated Paekje and began to unite Korea, Christianity at last, in our own generation, has again become "a rainbow coalition," all colors, all races, all nations, a genuine global church.

#### D. The Third World's Three Continents

Now let us look at those fast-growing Third World churches by continents. How do they compare, for example, in the ratio of Christians in their population with other continents? These figures are for 1988 and are based on total adherents, not recorded

<sup>7</sup>WCE, p.9.

church membership<sup>8</sup>

Latin America was said to be	93% Christian.
North America	86%
Europe	83%
Africa	46%
Soviet Russia	36%
Asia (excl. Oceania)	7%
[South Asia	8%]
[East Asia	6%]

Later statistics below may vary from this somewhat, depending on differing estimates<sup>9</sup>, and surely no reminder is needed to emphasize that the numbers include anyone who merely claims to be a Christian. We are warned that "Not everyone who says Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 7:21). But the percentages do indicate some stark contrasts in the way the larger mass concentrations of those who profess to follow Christ are so irregularly distributed around the world.

#### 1. Africa

In 1900 only one-half of one of the global village's 34 Christian families was African; in 1990 almost 5 out of 33 were African. The numerical jump was even more staggering, from almost 9 million to 230 million in only ninety years, and the Christian proportion of Africa's people had risen from 8 to 47%.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>World Almanac 1990, p. 611. The percentage for East Asia is based on an estimate of 81.5 million Christians, which in turn may be based on a debatably high figure for China, as is also the estimate of 84.5 m. in IBMR update 1990 (Jan.), p.27. A median figure among those often quoted, which range from an unquestionably low official report of 10 m. up to 60 m. and more, would be around 30 to 40 million Christians in China.

<sup>9</sup>Because of lack of space the statistical bases used in this article are not included here.

<sup>10</sup>The numerical increase (from 8.8 m. to 231 m) in proportion to world population was from 0.5% in 1900 to 4.5% in 1990. (WCE, p. 782, for 1900; and World Almanac 1990. But compare IBMR update for 1990).

This was nearly double the rate of growth of the continent's exploding population.

But at the halfway point, in the 1950s, the experts and the futurists were ready to mark Africa off as an opportunity lost. The days of Christianity on the continent were over, they said. Western colonialism was collapsing. Islam was on the move, and Muslim evangelists were swarming south with the persuasive slogan, "Islam is black; and so is Africa." Broadly tolerant of African customs and morals, Muslims were far less demanding of sharp changes and hard decisions than their uncompromising and highly visible Christian counterparts. It was easy to become a Muslim, and potentially dangerous not to when local chiefs and national political powers were turning to Islam. In 1952, in Africa's most populous country, Nigeria, a world Christian survey noted with alarm that in Ibadan, then the largest city in West Africa, more than half the city's population of 400,000 had been converted to Islam in only 20 years. Yet Ibadan had only two Muslim primary schools and more than 20 Christian schools. Christian education had long been the pride of Africa's Christian missions, but it was proving to be no match for Muslim evangelism. In some parts of West Africa the green tide of Islam was making converts at ten times the rate of the Christian church.<sup>11</sup> The cross, said the realist, back there in the 1950s and 1960s, will soon lose Africa to the crescent.

Others, equally pessimistic but for a different reason, attributed the inevitable decline of Christianity in Africa not so much to the resurgence of Islam as to the retreat of the West. The collapse of the Western empires was astonishingly rapid. One analyst has figured that in 1945 "99.5% of the non-Western world was under western domination." Only 25 years later, in 1969, 99.5%

<sup>11</sup>Cecil Northcott, *Christianity in Africa* (1963), p. 60.

of the non-Western world was independent<sup>12</sup>

In early 1951 only three African nations were independent, and only one of them had always been independent, Ethiopia. Then the empires crumbled, and Africa shook itself free. Six African nations achieved independence in the 1950s. In the one year of 1960 alone no less than seventeen African nations declared themselves free and sovereign; and twelve more joined them before the 1960s ended.

The colonies lasted only sixty years. They disappeared in twenty. But Africans remember. Colonialism is gone for the most part, but its scars are still there. So in the stormy chaos of the 60s, as the empires of the "Christian" West crumbled and the Muslim religion advanced, and as an appealing new faith, communism, appeared to promise liberation for the oppressed and prosperity for the exploited, it seemed altogether possible that Africa would not only take back its land from the imperialists but also hand back the Bible to the missionaries and send them packing with the departing colonizers.

But what actually happened was just the opposite. The predicted sweep of Islam slowed down to a crawl, barely keeping up with the population increase.<sup>13</sup> It is no longer breaking out into central Africa, but is still largely limited to Africa's northern rim, as it has been for the most of the last 1300 years. In the first ninety years of this century, the continent's population increased  $5\frac{1}{2}$  times; the Muslims 7 times; but the Christians 31 times:

<sup>12</sup>Ralph Winter, *The 25 Unbelievable Years* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1970).

<sup>13</sup>*World Almanac 1990*, p. 611. See also Ralph Winter, in *Frontier Mission on Muslim world growth compared to population increase*, also see *Target Earth*, p. 124 f.

Africa	1900	1988
Population	108,000,000	606,000,000
Christian adherents	9,000,000 (8%)	282,000,000 (47%)
Muslim adherents	35,000,000 (32%)	253,153,000 (42%)

Continentially the African church is the fastest growing church in the world: 9 million Christians in 1900, 282 million Christians today. That is an incredible 30 times as many as 90 years ago. By contrast, Europe has less than 2 times as many Christians today as in 1900.<sup>14</sup> Some people say there is an overall, net increase of 16,800 *new* Christians in Africa every day.

What are they like, these African Christians? They are some of the oldest churches in the world, like the Coptic church in Egypt and the Ethiopian Orthodox church, but most of the ancient Christianity of North Africa was wiped out 1300 years ago by the Muslim conquest. At the other end of the continent is South Africa where racism has made Christianity as much of a problem as a hope, which is not typical of the continent as a whole. Only a half of one of the Christian African families in the global village would be South African<sup>15</sup>

African Christianity is 40% Roman Catholic, 30% Protestant and Anglican, and 14% Orthodox. The Roman Catholics are growing faster than the Protestants and the Orthodox, in part, at least because while Protestants were declaring a moratorium on foreign missionaries, the Roman Catholics increased the number of theirs.

But another factor forbids too easy generalizations which try to link growth to the number of missionaries. Sometimes there is a connection, sometimes not. The fastest growing segment of the

<sup>14</sup>*World Almanac 1990* and *WCE*, p. 4, for 1900.

<sup>15</sup>27m. Christians in S. Africa (1982); 231 Christians in all Africa (1990), R. Winter and B. Graham, "Parade of the Nations" (Pasadena: U. S. Center for World Mission, 1982), p. 11; and *IBMR*, 1990.

fastest-growing continental Christian movement in the world is not African Roman Catholic, and does not even call itself African Protestant. They are African Independent, and they are about 16% (the statistics are shaky here) of Africa's Christians, almost 25 million of whom are Independent.

They go by strange names: The Mission of God of the Candle and the God's All Times Association of Ethiopia, and Lost Israelites of Kenya, but do not smile patronizingly at the names. In the past forty years, these Independent Protestants have outnumbered the once-dominant Anglicans and Presbyterians.<sup>16</sup>

But as a concluding footnote on the church in Africa, let me say this. Do not count out the mainline churches. More than the Independents they were the evangelistic force that changed Africa from 77% unevangelized in 1900 to a 75% evangelized continent in 1980 (distinguishing between "evangelized" and "converted").<sup>17</sup> More than any African Independents, the Christian mission schools of the mainline were also the foundation of an educational network that became the most influential factor in the cultural, political and industrial transformation of the continent. Thanks to mainline missions the African church had the size for changing a culture, and the education, and therefore the political influence. More than the African Independents, the major churches (and here I include the Roman Catholic), gave Africa its leadership for independence: Nkrumah of Ghana, Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenyatta of Kenya, Kaunda of Zambia and Banda of Malawi, to mention only those in former British territories. Christianity in Africa is vital and growing, and despite many problems, is still the hope of the continent's future.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>As of about 1980: 24,500,000 m. "non-white indigenous" Independents; 10,600,000 Anglicans, and 6,500,000 Presbyterian and Reformed (*WCE*).

<sup>17</sup>*WCE*, p. 796. Cf. *Target Earth*, p. 140.

<sup>18</sup>The figures below indicate the dominant role which Christianity now

## 2. Latin America.

In 1900 four of the "global village's" 34 families was Latin American; in 1990 the number was eight out of 33. The continent's percentage of Christians in proportion to world population had doubled. The number of adherents had increased seven-fold, from 60 million to 438 million. But its proportional growth in the continent's population had barely changed. It may even have declined.<sup>19</sup> Its history has been troubled.

The Spanish colonizers made Latin America the most statistically Christian of all the continents in all the wrong ways, which is why, perhaps, though they gave enough of a Christian mass base to change indelibly its culture and history; those wrong ways of Christianizing also left the continent with an almost insuperable burden of problems: economic injustice, rampant poverty, national divisions and rivalries and a vast suffocating blanket of nominal Christianity. It was too much for Latin America's George Washington, Simon Bolivar. His revolution of liberation, beginning in 1806, dreamed of uniting the south in one great free republic. It never happened. Roman Catholic interests and the dominance of an elitist minority made democracy impossible, and the continent split into twenty different nations.

The people, too, are divided, racially, socially and economically. The Indians were then 45% of the population. They now number only 15%. And the rest of the people, white and mixed, have swamped the continent with a runaway growth rate, which has crowded 475 million people into a land which had only 65

plays among Africa's religious communities (figures as of 1985 from *WCE*, p. 782): Christian adherents 236 m., Muslim 215 m., Tribal religions 64 m.

<sup>19</sup>An increase from 3.7% to 8.2% of world population in 1990; but in Latin America a change from 95% to 97% (*IBMR*) or 93.4% (*Almanac*). See *World Almanac 1990*, which reports 402 m. as of 1988, and *IBMR* update which estimates 437 m. in 1990. Compare *Target Earth*, p.100, for other differences.

million 90 years ago. I doubt if Latin America's basic social problem is either political oppression or foreign economic imperialism. Both are serious problems, but I suspect it is population pressure that ignites the fires that keep the continent in a permanent state of poverty, instability, and erupting revolutions.

How does the church in Latin America, which has so largely shaped and dominated the culture in which it now lives, survive its apparent inability to bring justice and a measure of hope into the lives of the people? Should not a 95% Christian continent be doing better than that?

The Roman Catholics were there first by about 300 years, and are still so completely dominant that Protestant observers rather smugly tend to lay the blame on them. After all, 400 million out of a total continental population (including Mexico) of 451 million, claim to be Roman Catholic, compared to only 38 million Protestants (or evangelicals, as Protestants are called south of the border).<sup>20</sup> To put it in terms of that global village of 100 families: Out of the 33 Christian families in the village, 8 are in Latin America, 7 of these are Roman Catholic, 1 of these is Protestant.

But it is as unChristian for Protestants to bash Roman Catholics as for Roman Catholics to persecute Protestants. The antiCatholicism of forty or so years ago is disappearing, as is Roman Catholic persecution of Latin American Protestants, though instances still occur, especially in just the past few years. We no longer use such pejorative comparisons of North American and Latin American Christianity as the oft-quoted remark, "The Puritans came to America looking for God; the Spanish came looking for gold."

It was the then president of this seminary, John Mackay, who returned from a trip through Latin America in the early 1950s and began to urge Protestants to look south in a startlingly different way. He said, "The future of the Gospel in Latin

<sup>20</sup>See *IBMR*, 1900, and *WCE* for 1985 comparison.



America is in the hands of the Roman Catholics and the Pentecostals." That was Protestant heresy almost in 1950. And when he added insult to injury and praised the Pentecostals, whom main-line Americans were still calling Holy Rollers, and "lunatic fringe," long on emotion but short on theology and intellect. So how could the president of Princeton be so naive?

But he was right, of course. Now, forty years later, Roman Catholic renewal and grass roots base communities, on one hand, and Pentecostal growth and vigour, on the other, are obviously the wave of the foreseeable future there, so that there is no way to limit a study of the Third-World churches in Latin America to Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists and Baptists. I cannot be fair to Latin American church realities and limit myself to Protestant denominations.

*Roman Catholics.* The most important single development in Latin American Christianity in our time is Roman Catholic renewal. It began before the 1960s, but it was the great Catholic council of Vatican II that gave it momentum, and it reached its peak eight years later at the Conference of Latin Bishops (CELAM) in Medellin in 1968.

The renewal of Latin American Roman Catholicism began with a rediscovery of the Bible. As early as 1903 Pope Leo XIII established an Institute of Biblical Studies in Rome. Some describe that event as "a ticking time bomb" with a potential to explode spiritual power through a church which for centuries had been comparatively unexposed to open Bible study. Then Vatican II in the '60s flung open the windows for the winds of change. It gave Third World bishops a voice and an effective hearing for the first time. In 1968 the Latin American bishops at Medellin, 130 of them, met and delivered what has been called "a platform for Christian revolution." Its three major points were these:

1. An admission of Catholic failure. "For the first time in history the Latin American hierarchy recognized that the continent [had not been Christianized, but] was living in a

"situation of sin."

2. A recognition of the priority of a "gospel for the poor."

3. An approval of liberation theology as the RC theology of mission for Latin America<sup>21</sup>

But Medellin 1968 was not quite "a platform for revolution." Even during the conference the bishops were divided, and at the next Bishops' conference at Puebla in 1977, the pendulum swung back from revolution toward moderation. A new Pope, John Paul II, warned against political activity and recommended greater support for the pastoral and spiritual functions of the priesthood.

But he had seen too much poverty on his trip to Mexico to turn his back on the poor. He expressed doubts about liberation theology, but openly preached a gospel of liberation from poverty.<sup>22</sup>

Latin American Roman Catholicism is still divided, with the hierarchy growing more conservative, but with the so-called "base ecclesial communities" (not quite churches and not quite Roman Catholic communes) gathering for prayer and Bible study and local community action, sometimes helped by priests, sometimes criticized by the hierarchy, but still growing. And by any count one makes, Latin America is still Roman Catholic.

*The Pentecostals.* The Pentecostals are at the other end of the ecclesiastical spectrum from the Roman Catholics. They are the second-most important religious grouping on the continent, but in terms of fast growth they are first. They are the fastest growing segment of Latin American Protestantism, which in itself has shocked that basically Roman Catholic continent with an explosion of evangelical growth in a nominally Roman Catholic land.

Here are the statistics:<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup>See Penny Leroux, in *Puebla and Beyond*, eds., J. Eagleson and P. Scharper (Orbis, 1980), p. 11 ff.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid, pp. 34-37.

<sup>23</sup>Peter Wagner, *Look out, The Pentecostals Are Coming!* p. 25.

In 1900, Latin Amerca had only about	50,000 Protestants.
By the 1930s, their growth had passed the	1,000,000 mark.
In the 1940s, they passed	2,000,000
In the 1950s they reached	5,000,000
By 1973 they had already passed	20,000,000
In 1990 the number of Protestants was	38,000,000

In a way, moving from Roman Catholicism in Latin America to the Pentecostal movement on that continent is like moving from Post-Constantinian Christianity back to the New Testament, from a world of massive Christian unity and political power back to a world where Jesus Christ is risen and present, and God is very near, and the Holy Spirit very active, a world of personal religion, and spiritual ecstasy. But, it must be added, it is also moving out of unity into Christian divisiveness.

This seems to be the Protestant pattern in Latin America. Mainline churches—Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist—plant the seed faithfully, build foundations soundly, carry on faithful missionary work for years. But God who works in mysterious ways, proceeds to grant the increase to the Pentecostals.

The largest Protestant denomination south of the border is the Assemblies of God of Brazil but they began as Baptists. In Chile, where Pentecostals also outnumber all other Protestants, they began as Methodists. And the second largest Protestant church in Latin America, the Pentecostal Christian congregation of Brazil, began as Presbyterian. Ninety years ago Pentecostals in Latin America were barely visible on the mainline fringe. Today three out of every four Protestants on the continent are Pentecostal.

Of course they have their weaknesses. I could list five: (1) They are strongest among the poor, but their outlook is middle class. (2) They "emphasize Christ's lordship, but tend to forget His servanthood." (3) They often give a higher authority to immediate revelations from the Spirit than to the clear teachings of Scripture. (4) Their church structure is highly authoritarian,

passing down directly from Christ to the pastor, from pastor to his own disciples, and from them to their disciples. They call this "yoking together."<sup>24</sup>

But how greatly their strengths outweigh their weaknesses. Here is a list of six strengths: (1) Their Christ centeredness. Unlike traditional Pentecostalism which is "Spirit-centered," Latin charismatics clearly root in Jesus Christ the expressions and power of the Spirit. (2) Their wide use of the Bible. Like the Reformers they took the Bible away from the priests and opened it to the laity. (3) Their emphasis on love, not power, but love. This explains (4) their close fellowship in the church, which to them is not organization by a book of order but by a living community. (5) Their ecumenicity, therefore, is not organizational but personal, informal and open to all who have "the experience of the Spirit."<sup>25</sup>

Christianity in Latin America, if it can learn compassion for the poor from a renewed Roman Catholicism, and commitment and enthusiasm from the refreshing evangelistic winds of Pentecostalism, and the enduring power of an educated evangelical church from the still strong roots of mainline protestantism—if it can do all this without further tearing apart the Body of Christ it may yet undo the damage of centuries of Christian mistakes in Latin America and become once more salt and light for the whole continent.

### 3. Asia

Asia was the least Christian continent in the world in 1900, statistically speaking, and that has not changed in the past ninety years even though its percentage of Christians to world population

<sup>24</sup> Orlando Costas, *Latin American Evangelist* (March/April, 1977), p. 10

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

has quadrupled, from 1% in 1900 to 4% 1990. That means that of the 34 Christian "families" in the global village ninety years ago, 1900 only one was Christian, whereas of 1990's 33 families nearly four were Christian.<sup>26</sup>

The increase is more significant than it looks, for Asia has more people than all four of the other large continents combined—Africa, Latin America, Europe and North America—so that when Asia multiples the number of its Christians by four times, the numerical increase is from 18 million to somewhere between 180 million and a reported 227 million.<sup>27</sup> But the proportion of Christians in Asia's huge population of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  billion is still low, only 7%.

A comparison with the growth of other Asian religions is given below in a footnote using five-year old figures from 1985. It shows significant changes, even without the yet more startling recent discoveries of hitherto hidden Christian growth in China.<sup>28</sup>

Of all the people in the world, 60% live in Asia. The second largest country in Asia, India, has nearly as many people, for example, as the two other Third World continents, Africa and Latin America, combined.

But the mass of Asia's uncountable population proportionally reduces the influence of its Christians. Asia's 220 m. Christians

<sup>26</sup>In 1900 Asia (excluding Oceania) counted 18 m. Christians (*WCE*); in 1990 the reported number was 227 m. (*IBMR* update). But see footnote 8.

<sup>27</sup>From 1.4% to 4% in 1990. The numerical increase reported in *IBMR* 1990 was from 18m. to 223 m. (*WCE* and *IBMR* 1990, but the latter figure may be too high, based on higher than average estimates for China. I would, with some hesitation, adjust it downward about 37 m. to 180 m.).

<sup>28</sup>The chart below (derived from *WCE*, pp. 4, 782 f.) excludes Oceania. It numbers adherents (not members) and gives percentages of proportion to the continental population. It does not adequately reflect changes in China since 1976. In comparison to calculations elsewhere in this article, I add about 20 m. to the lower 1985 Asia statistics here and subtract about 30 m.

are now more than North America's 188 m., but they are like grains of sand scattered across the continent, and there is no comparing the visibility and influence of Christians on the two continents.

Only in five widely separated areas has there emerged a demographically significant concentration of Asian Christians: in Lebanon, the Philippines, Korea, and two provinces of India: Kerala in the southwest, and the tribal states of the Northeast Frontier.

In each of the five, the culture has been significantly shaped by a different Christian pattern. *Lebanon*, where Christians were first called Christians, and where the majority religion until very recently was Christian, mostly Maronite and Orthodox, is now perhaps only 45% Christian and slipping into self-destruction by warfare between its Christian factions while the Muslims take over the country. The *Philippines* is about 90% Christian statistically, and massively Roman Catholic. Its 40 m. Christians are the largest concentration of Christians on the Asian continent, and some indication of the church's influence was given by the prominent role of Cardinal Sin in the Aquino revolution.

from the higher, later estimates. See note 8. Estimates high or low for China are only educated guesses.

	1900	1985	1992
World population	946,000,000	1,619,000,000	2,314,000,000
World Xn adherents	558,000,000	1,459,000,000	5,450,000,000
Asia's population	946,053,000	2,773,973,000	3,155,000,000
Asia's Xn adherents	19,930,000 (1%)	148,000,000* ( 5.3%)	244,501,000
Asia's Hindus	203,000,000 (21%)	647,567,000 (23.3%)	
Asia's Non-religious	42,000 ( 0%)	618,000,000 (22.2%)	
Asia's Muslims	159,223,000 (17%)	190,000,000 (20.0%)	
China folk relig.	379,000,000 (40%)	190,000,000 ( 6.8%)	

\*Compare *World Almanac 1990* figures for 1988: world population 2,915 m.; world Christians 1,669. Asia: population 2,915 m.; Christians 213 m.; Non-religious 687 m.; Hindus 660 m.; Muslims 583 m.; and China folk religions 172 m.

*Kerala*, in India, is the traditional location of the mission of St. Thomas, "the apostle to Asia," and today is about 30% Christian. An indication of the pervasive presence of Christianity there is the Maramon gathering of Thomas Christians every summer, the largest regular annual gathering of Christians anywhere in the world. On the platform sitting side by side, a year or so ago, were the district's two members of parliament, one a St. Thomas Christian, which was to be expected, but the other was the communist member of parliament. Christians are too numerous, too important, and too influential in Kerala for any politician to ignore.

*South Korea* also is somewhere between 25% and 30% Christian. There the Protestants command the greatest national influence. They now outnumber Korean Buddhists, and within the Christian community outnumber the second largest denomination, Roman Catholicism, about 8 m. to 2 m. In fact Presbyterians alone outnumber Roman Catholics there almost three to one.

Methodism began in England with John Wesley, but the largest single Methodist congregation in the world is not in England; it is in Seoul, Korea, as a visitor from California pointed out ten years ago. Presbyterianism began in Geneva with John Calvin but the largest single Presbyterian church in the world is in Seoul, Korea. And Pentecostalism in its modern form began in Southern California, but the largest single Pentecostal church in the world is also in Seoul, Korea.

But in closing, instead of using Asia as an example of miracles of church growth, which I could so easily do, let me use it in a healthier and more Christian way as a challenge and as an example of the unfinished nature of the missionary task to reach the whole world for Christ.

Yes, Asia does have its victories of growth and Christian outreach. Revival in Indonesia. The mass movements of India, and the house-church movement in China. The pioneering begin-

nings of Third World missions in the islands of the Pacific and the radiating vitality of Asian missions around the world.

But despite all the achievements of modern missions, there are more non-Christians in Korea today than when my father first landed on that peninsula one hundred years ago. Japan may well have a lower percentage of Christians today than in its "Christian century" four hundred years ago. A whole handful of the least Christian countries in the world are in Asia: Mongolia, Bhutan, North and South Yemen, and Afghanistan. And the three most massive blocks of humanity resistant to Christian mission are all in Asia: the Muslims of the Middle East, the Hindus of India where only about five of the 300 castes have allowed a viable Christian community to emerge, and the still uncounted masses of Chinese.

The Lord Buddha was born in Asia, and most of the world's Buddhists live in Asia.

Confucius was born in Asia, and most of the world's Confucianists live in Asia.

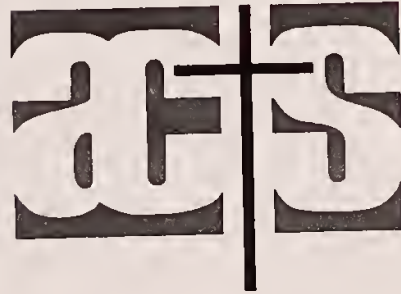
Muhammad was born in Asia, and most of the world's Muslims live in Asia.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was born in Asia. But Asia remains the continent most resistant to Him, and least effectively evangelized by His people in the world.

But I cannot stop there. I have spoken too much about mass. Let me mention again Einstein's equation. It speaks of mass and energy and light. The empowering is not in the mass but comes to it. The power, the energy comes from the velocity of light, and Jesus said, "I am the Light," and "Ye shall have power."

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